

PETITION FOR PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT OF HAZARDOUS WASTE THREATS IN
FLUSHING BAY, FLUSHING RIVER, AND WILLETS POINT (QUEENS, NY)

Hon. Judith Enck
Regional Administrator
U.S. EPA Region 2
290 Broadway
New York, NY 10007-1866

Under the authority of CERCLA Section 105 (d), as amended, the petitioner,

Jason Munshi-South, Ph.D

FOIA Exemption 6

hereby requests that Region II of the United States Environmental Protection Agency conduct a preliminary assessment of the suspected release of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant at the following location:

Flushing Bay, Flushing River, and Willets Point, Queens, NY: (see attached map)

Petitioner is affected by the release because:

I. I am a professional biologist employed at the City University of New York (CUNY Baruch College), and have conducted research on native small mammals in terrestrial environments adjacent to the artificial ponds created from Flushing River. These areas show evidence of soil pollution, and the ponds themselves have been degraded dramatically by past sewage spills. Furthermore, pollution in Willets Point and Flushing Bay has likely degraded the water quality and habitat quality of the Long Island Sound. The Long Island Sound is an important regional ecosystem harboring significant populations of horseshoe crabs, oysters, lobsters, and sportfish. Protected marine mammals such as the harbor and grey seal have also recently returned to the Sound.

II. The affected sites are in, or adjacent to, Flushing Meadows-Corona Park. The park is a large, public green space bordered by dense urban neighborhoods, which serves as the primary open space for hundreds of thousands of Queens residents. The park contains several important cultural institutions (i.e. the Queens Zoo, NY Hall of Science, Queens Museum of Art), recreational fields, and green areas for passive recreation. I live near the Park, and frequently visit these areas with my spouse and two young children. I am concerned that local residents are at risk of exposure to hazardous materials due to the long history of polluting activities in these areas.

Type or characteristics of the substances involved:

In general, the substances relate to the automotive repair shops, salvage and industries (i.e. asphalt factories, metal recycling) that have been operating in Willets Point for the last 80-100 years. Secondary concerns relate to the history of the sites as a coal ash dump, and past presence of a combined sewer overflow outlet into Flushing Bay. Likely pollutants include the following: **volatile organic compounds (VOCs), organic solvents, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), methane, petroleum, heavy metals (arsenic, barium, chromium, copper, lead, nickel, zinc), lead acid batteries, gasoline, and car radiator fluids.** The site also contains **underground storage tanks, some of which are unregistered and unmonitored.** The buildings at the site are known to contain **asbestos and lead-based paint.**

Nature and history of any activities that have occurred regarding the release / threatened release:

Willets Point has an 80-100 year history of industrial activity, automotive repair, and salvage operations. Many of these operations predated significant environmental regulations, but little is known of the legacy of pollution they left behind. The site is infamous in New York City for its poor roads, lack of sewers, and general atmosphere of nonadherence to environmental and safety regulations. Willets Point is largely built on landfill adjacent to the Flushing Bay and River, and thus highly prone to flooding during any heavy rains. It is likely that pollutants have been discharged repeatedly into groundwater at this site, with much greater amounts possible during flooding events. Much of this groundwater pollution ultimately must be discharged into Flushing Bay and River. Preliminary environmental surveys of the site have only inspected public right-of-way areas, and already found evidence of pollutants, oil drums, unregistered petroleum tanks, and other indicators of likely hazardous materials.

State and local authorities you have contacted about the release / threatened release and the response, if any:

Hon. Joseph Martens, Commissioner
Robert Schick - Director, Division of Environmental Remediation
Robert Cozzy - Remedial Bureau B Director
New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
625 Broadway
Albany, NY 12233-7011

Walter Mugdan
U.S. EPA Region 2
Director, Emergency & Remedial Response Division
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